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TAGS: PGOV PHUM RW

SUBJECT: RWANDA - PRISONS, JUSTICE SECTOR REFORMS

REF: KIGALI 599

Classified By: Ambassador Michael R. Arietti, reason 1.4 (B/D)

¶1. (C) Embassy and visiting DRL officers met with International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Head of Office Pierre Wattach (protect) on July 10 to discuss prison conditions in Rwanda. Wattach gave a generally positive report, despite identifying some lingering problem areas. The serious overcrowding monitors have described previously (reftel) is still straining Rwanda's prisons, but recent developments are encouraging. Wattach noted the ICRC has been granted access with or without providing advance notice to authorities and with an ease "unlike anywhere else." The flow of prisoners into the system has steadied, and the organization no longer provides food aid - the GOR has taken over the responsibility of feeding its prisoners. The death rate of prisoners is now equal to that of the general population, and national HIV programs are present in the system.

¶2. (C) Wattach said there is little or no ill-treatment in the nation's prisons and that torture "is not tolerated." Beatings do take place in a declining number of police stations. However, police authorities have adopted comprehensive policies against abuse, and "they mean it." There is "excellent listening" on the part of the GOR to the ICRC's approaches and the will to address the problems was quite evident. Wattach stated that very low numbers of detainees are held in military intelligence detention centers for short periods, and there have been no reports of abuses or disappearances for several years. The treatment there was "correct" and detainees were quickly transferred to regular military prisons where conditions were "quite satisfactory."

¶3. (C) In a separate meeting, LIPRODOHR Executive Secretary Jean Baptiste Ntibagororwa (protect) concurred with the ICRC's assessment, saying that the GOR had "abandoned poor treatment of prisoners." On rare occasions where abuses occur, actions were taken against those police officials involved. He also pointed to the meager resources of the GOR's prisons, which, combined with the large number of people in the system, have resulted in some extended detentions of suspects and poor conditions for prisoners and for those in Travaux d'Intrt Gnral (TIG) camps. (FYI: TIG camps are newly established sites where those convicted under gacaca perform community service. End FYI.) Ntibagororwa said LIPRODOHR staff is granted almost automatic access to most prisons, but they are not allowed to visit without first receiving authorization. They have been refused access to three of 16 prisons despite having

authorization, and have had difficulty visiting TIG camps.

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JUDICIAL REFORM  
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¶4. (SBU) The Ambassador and DRL officer met with Minister of Justice Tharcisse Karugarama on July 10 to discuss judicial reform. Karugarama began by reporting on the successful progress of a law abolishing the death penalty in Rwanda's Parliament. (FYI: The law has since been passed. End FYI.) He then outlined measures to strengthen the judiciary that are under consideration. These include increased salaries, and housing and transportation support to help combat corruption. While there are not enough qualified judges and lawyers in Rwanda, Karugarama said their numbers are growing.

He also mentioned the possibility of contracting judges to help lessen the burden on the system. Karugarama predicted increased stability and retention of legal professionals in the coming years.

¶5. (U) Septel covers discussions on civil society and human rights.

ARIETTI